DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 167 593 TM 008 366

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TITLE Commitment to Instructional Clients for R&E in the Cincinnati School System.
PUB DATE [Mar 78]
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (62nd, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, March 27-31, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Assessment; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Methods; Evaluation Needs; *Evaluators; *Institutional Autonomy; Models; Needs Assessment; Public School Systems; *Staff Role
IDENTIFIERS *Cincinnati Public Schools CH; *Context Input Process Product Evaluation Model; Ohio (Cincinnati)

ABSTRACT

Beginning in 1970, the Cincinnati Public Schools experienced a shift in emphasis from centralized evaluation to local school program development and evaluation. Three functional models currently operate to evaluate three programs: Title I, alternative integration, and disadvantaged students. Each is distinguished by the level of trust existing between local school and central administration. The models conform to Stufflebeam's CIPP model which involves four evaluation stages: (1) context (needs assessment); (2) input (selecting alternatives for meeting goals); (3) process (implementing the program); and (4) product (evaluating goals). The Local School Evaluator (LSE) is a centrally based but locally functioning specialist whose services can be explained within the CIPP framework. Process-product services include interpreting basic skill mastery reports, Title I school profiles, and data from alternative programs. Context-input services include standardized test item analyses, interpreting the annual school and community survey, and comparing results to previous years. (Author/CP)

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COMMITMENT TO INSTRUCTIONAL CLIENTS FOR R&E IN THE CINCINNATI SCHOOL SYSTEM

by

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Presented at Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association
Toronto, Canada

Printed in U.S.A.

TM008 366

Abstract

The Cincinnati School District has a strong commitment to serve the evaluation needs of instructional clients. From a background in which central administration needs have been paramount, the emphasis on services to local schools has emerged as a more effective means of program improvement. Beginning approximately in 1970, services of Local School Evaluators have been provided - first in Title I schools and subsequently in other settings.

Described here are three principal models of school evaluation currently operating in Cincinnati. The models are distinguished by the level of trust existing between local school and central administration in each of three program settings. The role of the Local School Evaluator in context, input, process and product evaluation is delineated.

Commitment to Instructional Clients for R&E in the Cincinnati School System

Introduction

Purpose of Paper

The purpose of this paper is to describe program evaluation services in the Cincinnati Public School system as they relate to the needs of instructional clients. The paper sets forth the role of the Local School Evaluator (LSE) as the person charged most directly with serving the instructional needs for evaluation services. This LSE role is presented in the context of the background from which it has emerged and specific models for school evaluation now functioning in the school system.

The underlying philosophy of local school evaluation in Cincinnati includes program evaluation as an important support service for instruction. The local commitment to this philosophy pervades all facets of planning and operation at both the school district and local school levels.

Plan of Paper

The paper is organized into four main sections. The first presents the background of evaluation in the Cincinnati schools, from which the role and function of the LSE has emerged. The second section describes three operational models within which the LSE renders service to instructional clientele. In the third section of the paper, a general description of the LSE role is presented. Finally, the fourth section details this role, describing specific services intended to serve the needs of instructional clients.

Background

Early History

The foundations of research and evaluation in Cincinnati, as in most other school systems, are found in the testing and survey movements of the 1920's and 30's. Prior to this time, inquiry and innovation rested almost entirely in the hands of the creative teacher and administrator. In 1929, the Division of Research and Statistics was organized in Cincinnati Public Schools. Nine years later, a separate division in the Department of Instruction was set up to administer the group testing program. These two divisions provided the first semblance of systematic structure and scientific orientation for R&E in Cincinnati.

With the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, there came a new emphasis on program evaluation. The mandate that the federally funded projects developed under Title I be systematically evaluated led to the creation of the Division of Program Development in 1965. Out of this division the current Department of Research and Development has emerged.

Early evaluation of Title I projects was organized and implemented almost exclusively to serve state and federal needs. To receive continued funding, the school district had to complete state evaluation forms and submit written reports of results. Local interest in the findings thus submitted was limited, and evaluation outcomes did little to impact program development or administration.

After several years, questions began to be asked nationally about the effectiveness of the Title I investment. This brought to the local district some increased pressure for program improvement. Gradually, it became more common to design the evaluation of programs to serve school district decision-making,

as well as state and national reporting needs. Still, the perennial conflict between scientific results and political expedience continued to limit the benefit derived from the evaluation effort.

A Change in Emphasis

Somewhere around the beginning of the 1970's, the emphasis began to change. Individual schools in the district were increasingly seeking autonomy in planning and implementing their instructional programs. The school district obtained a grant under Title III ESEA to create a "School-Community Evaluation and Development System." This system set up within one senior high school area a working partnership between school and community to develop and evaluate instructional programs. From this project there emerged a model for local school program development and evaluation which, although never officially adopted by the Board, has dramatically influenced school district evaluation services.[1]

The position of LSE was first operationalized within Title I. Approximately half the resources formerly invested in the centralized evaluation of Title I were diverted to serve local school needs through this position. Lack of available funds has limited the implementation of this service in other school settings. Nevertheless, the demand for this kind of service has brought about the extension of the position to serve the school district's alternative schools and those schools included under the state program for disadvantaged students.

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[1] Jacobs, James. "A Model for Program Development and Education." Theory into Practice, Vol. 13 (February, 1974), 15-21.

Functional Models for School Evaluation

Basic Principles

Each of the three program settings in which local school evaluation is conducted has a distinct model. The models have been developed to respond to the distinctive characteristics of the respective programs, the varying evaluation needs of instructional and administrative clientele and the existing trust level among the personnel involved in the programs. An understanding of these three models will facilitate appreciation for the local commitment to instructional clientele.

The underlying conceptual model for program evaluation services throughout the school system is Stufflebeam's CIPP Model.[2] This model sets forth four stages for evaluation as a means of "delineating, obtaining, and providing information for decision making." The first stage is context evaluation which involves needs assessment and goal development. Input evaluation, the second stage, includes the review of various alternatives that might accomplish the goals that have been selected. In the third stage, process evaluation, the implementation of the selected program is monitored to insure that plans are carried out according to schedule. Finally, product evaluation looks at the outcomes of the educational program to determine whether objectives and goals have in fact been attained.

It is vital that each model for school evaluation take all four CIPP stages into account. It is conceivable that various models might include common elements under any one of these stages. In fact, this is almost inevitable in the case of operational models because of the similarities of programs and personnel.

Above all, evaluation at each stage must be done in context. In focusing on the needs of instructional clients and of the local school in general, provision must also be made for the needs of the total school system. Serving local

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[2] Stufflebeam, D.L.; Foley,W.J.: Gephart,W.J.; Guba, E.G.; Hammond, R.L.; Merriman, H.O.; and Provus, M.M. Educational Evaluation and Decision Making. Itasca, Illinois: Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1971.

school needs remains practical only to the extent that the Board and top-level administrators recognize that improvement at this level is the surest means of effecting overall improvement of education in the school district.

High-Trust Model

The operational model for Title I evaluation respresents the highest trust level within the organization. Fourteen years of Title I activity have given stability and a degree of security to the program. Working relationships have been built up in which trust has been generated through cooperative striving for common goals.

Although the CIPP Model begins with the process of assessing needs and setting goals, the model does not pretend to represent a linear succession of actual events. In practice, the academic year, which comprises a logical unit of evaluation planning, puts the evaluation of process and product before context and input evaluation. The descriptions of the operational models will follow this sequence.

Process. Process evaluation in Title I has the LSE working cooperatively with the instructional consultant assigned to the individual school. This LSE-consultant team cooperates in helping the local school staff monitor the implementation of its program and finds ways of improving day-to-day operation. At the same time, the team feeds forward to the Title I administrative staff important findings of process evaluation that might lead to large-scaled program improvements.

The commitment to serve the needs of the clients directly involved in instructional seldom is weakened by the requirements of central administration. This dual obligation, however, could not be maintained in an atmosphere where the trust level was not high.

Product. In much the same way the LSE, in carrying out product evaluation, focuses on the needs of the local school, but also feeds information forward to the central evaluator. At the local school level, product information tends to be directed at the pupil or class level. For central evaluation purposes, the total school program under Title I is more likely to be the unit of focus.

Again, the two functions rarely conflict. It is generally understood and frequently emphasized that, should conflicts occur, the LSE's first loyalty is to the local school. In the high-trust environment of Title I, this has not been a serious problem for some time.

Context. Evaluation of product leads naturally into the identification of further needs. In this model context evaluation (needs assessment and goal development) takes place simultaneously at the local school and school district levels. The LSE provides information for local school needs assessment from a wide variety of sources. Again, focus on individual pupil needs is critical at this level. The central evaluator is responsible for the information to be used in assessing the needs of the total program. In part, this information is compiled from individual school data.

Input. After needs have been identified and goals developed, there comes the evaluation of alternative ways of attaining these goals. Federal guidelines, as well as state and local policies, form the parameters for these alternatives. Several global objectives for the total program delineate these parameters with some precision.

Given these boundaries, the local school is free to develop its program and set the specific objectives to be accomplished in the course of the year. The LSE and consultant work closely with the school in accomplishing this. The

school district's total Title I program thus becomes the assembly of the individual schools' developed projects. Constraints built into the global objectives give the total program a high degree of cohesion and internal consistency.

Moderate-Trust Model

The school district's second application of the LSE role came as a result of the rapid development of alternative programs in the past five years. As a means of achieving voluntary integration and better serving diverse student needs, alternative programs in Cincinnati were created and expanded at a rate that has made the school district a national leader in this movement. Fortunately, the numerous problems involved in achieving this rapid innovation with very limited financial resources have created a cooperative spirit among the staff involved in this effort. The locally funded alternative programs do not have the stability and security of Title I. Nevertheless, the general atmosphere surrounding the evaluation of these programs may be designated as one of moderate trust.

Process. To conduct the process and product evaluation of alternatives, a team structure has been devised to facilitate self-study and to feed information forward for central decision-making. The evaluation function in this model differs from that of the high-trust model in that the makeup of the evaluation team includes community representation. Another key difference is that the administrative evaluation of the programs is conducted in third party fashion by an evaluator not directly tied to the team functioning.

Alternative evaluation procedures call for the evaluation team to visit each school site twice in the course of the year. The visit begins with a discussion of evaluative data assembled by the LSE. In the course of the day, the team observes the instructional program, inspects the school and talks with

teachers and students. An evaluation instrument calling for comments and ratings is completed and this information is further discussed at the conclusion of the visit.

Product. The evaluation instrument has two parts. One part is shared only by team members and local school personnel. The information, both product and process, is intended exclusively to guide local program improvements. The second part of the evaluation information is forwarded to the central evaluator who has the responsibility of reconciling the ratings of the team members with existing evaluative data on the program. Where discrepancies are perceived, the central evaluator attempts to resolve these through discussion with team members or through school visitation.

Context. Again, the assessment of needs flows naturally from the outcomes of product evaluation. As planning is begun for the following school year, goals that have not been met are identified and enlarged upon. At the local school level, the LSE serves as a resource person for the principal and his staff in this goal-development process. At the central level, the process may focus on the total range of alternatives or on a particular program that may be located in several schools.

Input. The evaluation of alternatives means of reaching the goals follows along the same lines. The instructional consultant assigned to an individual school will be the primary resource person. External consultants are also often used in this process. The same personnel most commonly serve the input evaluation needs of central administration.

Low-Trust Model

The state program for serving the needs of disadvantaged pupils in Cincinnati represents a setting of relatively low trust between local school and central

administration. Funds made available through the state Disadvantaged Pupils Public Fund (DPPF) program have historically been used to supplement Title I resources. For a number of years, these funds have been concentrated at the secondary level. It is not within the purview of this paper to trace the complex reasons for the relatively low level of trust, but a strong demand for local autonomy and recent cutbacks in funding have been two main contributors.

Process. The budget for evaluation in DPPF has been minimal from the outset. In the Title I program, approximately three or four percent of the total school district's allocation has been dedicated to evaluation. The DPPF limit has been set at one percent. This has limited the involvement of the evaluation staff in process evaluation in this program.

To the extent that the LSE has time to serve the schools to which he/she is assigned, the focus is on helping staff members conduct their own process evaluation. The LSE suggests ways in which the local staff can insure compliance with their program plan and with other state and local requirements.

An external evaluation consulting team is contracted to conduct process evaluation for administrative purposes. Team members visit each DPPF site four times in the course of the year. Part of their responsibility is to report situations in which the project implementation varies appreciably from the approved plan.

Product. Instructional and administrative needs for product evaluation are served in a similar manner. The LSE, working as a program advocate, seeks to identify the major strengths of the program and to produce data reflecting these strengths. Within the confidentiality of his/her relationship to the local staff, the LSE shares information about program weakness as well. It is the basic responsibility of the external consultants to uncover program weaknesses

and to report these to central administration. The report of this team sets priorities for program cutbacks in the event of further decreases in funding.

Context. In settings where the LSE has succeeded in building a reasonable degree of trust he/she can be a valuable resource to the local school staff in identifying needs and setting goals. In this model, the LSE has no responsibility for feeding information forward for the needs of central administration. The findings of the external evaluation team are used to point the direction to future needs. From these needs, goals for the total DPPF program are formulated and modified.

Input. As with the other three stages in this model, input evaluation is kept separate for instructional and administrative purposes. The LSE will work with instructional consultants as appropriate in helping the local staff in evaluating alternative ways of achieving goals. Larger program decisions are made at the school district level on the basis of information supplied by the external evaluation team.

Overview

The three functional models contain some ingredients that seem crucial to effective operation at respective trust levels. For instance, the use of external consultants to serve central administration needs is seen as important in the low-trust model, especially when program cutbacks appear imminent. The LSE could not maintain the confidence of local school staff if he/she were seen as a kind of central-office spy.

On the other hand, other ingredients of the models are more the result of other local circumstances than essential provisions for given trust levels. An example is the inclusion of community representatives on alternative evaluation teams.

General Description of LSE Role

The LSE is based in the central administration offices of the school system. He/she is assigned a group of schools whose respective evaluation needs he/she must serve. Early in the school year, the LSE makes contact with the assigned schools and outlines available services. The functioning of the LSE for the year is determined in large measure by the specific services requested by the instructional personnel at the local school level.

In cases where response to the initial contact is slow, the LSE will attempt to stimulate further interest by offering assistance in addressing specific local school problems. These offers frequently take the form of letting one school know of a service that has proven valuable in another location. The history of local school evaluation in Cincinnati indicates that the services of the LSE are valued as a means of improving instruction.

Ahn, Barta and Rockwood have described the LSE function as an evaluation track of services supporting the instructional track. Needs assessment supports the selection of content and goals; diagnosis of entry behavior supports the specifications of objectives. Assessment of implementation supports the selection and implementation of strategy, group, time, space and resources; and assessment of end results supports the instruction process itself.[3]

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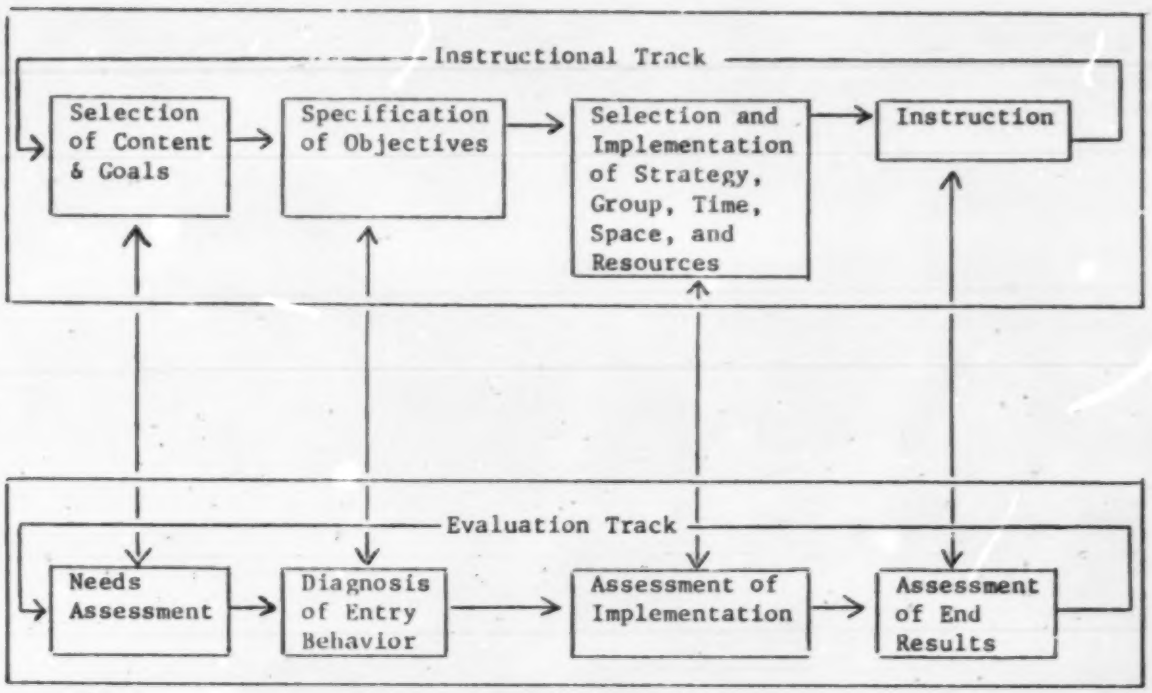
[3]Ahn, Unhai R.; Barta, Maryann B.; Rockwood, Stacy F.; Localizing Evaluation for Public Schools: Concept and Practice, Presented at Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, California.



Specific Services

Detailing the numerous and varied services rendered by LSE's in Cincinnati is too great a task for a paper of this length. Rather, this section will describe six specific services selected as representative. Three of these serve the process and product evaluation functions and three the context and input evaluation functions.

Process-Product

Alternative Data. The procedures for evaluating alternative programs (moderate-trust level) call for the LSE to furnish the evaluation team with relevant data. In the course of the team visit, the major focus is on process and product evaluation. The visit begins with a discussion of data that the

LSE has assembled, and the interpretation of this information by the evaluator is crucial to setting the tone for the visit.

Data forms have been devised for summarizing the data on the alternative programs in accordance with the set of alternative questions (approximately 100) prescribed for team response. Of primary interest here are those questions that generate comments and ratings to be shared only at the local school level. These questions concern curriculum, administration staffing needs, space utilization and concerns of persons involved.

For example, the LSE provides data to answer the question, "Does the status of reading achievement scores suggest a change in overall program emphsis?" Another question related to curriculum is, "Do item data reflect certain skills that need increased emphasis or modified approach?" Related to student concerns the evaluator compiles data to answer the question, "Do students' survey results suggest specific concerns that the program or staff should address?" In the course of the visit, team members also seek an answer to the question, "Does casual student questioning reflect other matters of important concern to students?"

At the conclusion of the visit, each team member completes the evaluation instrument including comments and ratings. This information is then compiled by the LSE and shared with team members. That portion of the evaluation designed for central administration is forwarded to the Coordinator of Program Evaluation, and the LSE is available as a resource person in local school discussions of the total assembly of evaluative information.

CIMS Reports. Another service of the LSE related to process and product evaluation is assisting staff in interpreting and applying reports from the Cincinnati Instructional Management System (CIMS). This is a computerized

system of monitoring student progress in achieving fundamental reading and arithmetic skills. The teacher using the CIMS inventories can more easily keep track of each student's progress in skill mastery. The evaluator can assist the teacher in understanding the computer-generated reports, recognizing common needs of students and planning strategies to serve these needs.

One CIMS report, for example, indicates students' mastery levels on each of a variety of reading skills. These include skills in phonetic analysis, structure analysis, vocabulary, literal comprehension and interpretive comprehension. If several students reading at approximately the same level show a weakness in distinguishing hard and soft g sounds, the teacher can arrange practice in that skill for these students. It is this kind of focus that the evaluator helps to make possible in working with CIMS.

Title I School Profile. Because of the availability of resources for Title I evaluation, each Title I school has a larger amount of data than other schools in the system. Over the last several years, LSE's have worked to help school staffs use this information for instructional improvement. One important part of this approach has been the Title I school profile.

Essentially, this profile helps the staff of an individual school evaluate certain process and product outcomes in the light of comparison with other Title I schools. This has been a recommended approach among these inner-city school units, which formerly suffered from comparison with schools in more affluent communities.

The school profile includes information on student achievement as measured by standardized tests. Information on student attendance; teacher, parent, and student attitudes; data on parent involvement--all of these are included in profiling the Title I school against the background of other schools in the program.

Context-Input

Item Report. One of the most frequently requested services of the LSE is training in the use of standardized test item analysis. The LSE helps teachers use the results of specific items to diagnosis student and group needs for instruction or remediation.

Several approaches have been devised to make this process easier for teachers. Among these are the pupil item report worksheet and the group report worksheet. The pupil worksheet allows the teacher to list names of students whose item results suggest a need for more practice time, further diagnosis or other reinforcement. The group worksheet permits the comparison of class unit or school unit item data with similar data for the school system.

Survey information. The LSE also helps the school staff identify needs and set goals on the basis of information collected through annual survey. Each spring, surveys of administrators, teachers, parents and students are conducted throughout the school system. Results of these surveys provide valuable barometers of attitudes which the evaluator can help the local staff understand and apply.

The student survey, for example, contains a number of items related to self-concept. By comparing the results of these items from one year to the next and with results from other schools, the staff can gain useful insight into specific needs for program emphasis.

School Information System. The survey results on each school are stored in the district's School Information System. This data bank includes several hundred variables on each school unit. A number of these, e.g., drop-out rates by cause, socio-economic variables, etc., are very useful in context and input evaluation.

Each year the school receives a comprehensive report of its data as contained in the School Information System. The sheer volume of this report makes it important that someone be available on a consulting basis to help the instructional staff interpret and apply the information.

Summary

This paper has attempted to describe the commitment of the Cincinnati School District to serving instructional clientele through evaluation. The emphasis on local school services has grown out of a background in which centralized--usually administrative--needs had been paramount. Increasing recognition of the fact that a local school focus is important if evaluation is to have real payoff caused the shift in emphasis, beginning approximately in 1970.

Three chief models of school evaluation are currently operating in Cincinnati. These have been described in some detail, so that the role and services of the LSE could be better understood.

Essentially, the LSE is a centrally-based but locally-functioning specialist. He/she serves the evaluation needs of the local staff in examining process and product of educational programs, in assessing needs and in finding the best ways of meeting these needs.